

# St Peter's Catholic School and Specialist Science College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104119
<b>Local Authority</b>	Solihull
<b>Inspection number</b>	336239
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 October 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rashida Sharif HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1283
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	263
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr M Cusack
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs F M McGarry
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 May 2007
<b>School address</b>	Whitefields Road Solihull West Midlands
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 36 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and a representative from the local authority. They observed the school's work, looked at a range of documentation and undertook an analysis of questionnaires returned by parents, students and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the contribution of the specialist status in science on the overall quality of education provided
- the extent to which the school's curriculum and support services meet the needs of all students and enables them to achieve their potential
- the progress made by all students in lessons
- the extent to which the school has acted upon the issues identified in its last inspection
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels, especially the consistency of provision between subjects.

## Information about the school

St Peter's Catholic School and Science Specialist College is larger than most secondary schools. The great majority of students come from White British Backgrounds, with Irish heritage students forming the largest subgroup. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is significantly below the national average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also well below the average. The school has been successfully re-designated as a specialist science college, as a Healthy School and as an Investor in People. It has also gained a second specialism in Applied Learning and an International School award.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

### Main findings

St Peter's Catholic School and Science Specialist College is a good school with many outstanding features. It is a popular school that has not stood still since the last inspection. Staff, governors and students are actively involved in making this a strongly inclusive school which effectively raises the aspirations of its students and staff alike. Staff share a sense of purpose and are highly committed to the school's Catholic values and its continued improvement. Students are rightly proud of their school and enjoy their learning experiences as reflected in their outstanding attendance. They make consistently good progress, with some making exceptional progress in their time at school. Students with specific or additional needs follow a programme of personalised learning and consequently make good progress in relation to their starting points. Standards have continued to rise, particularly because the school has improved its tracking systems. The school can accurately identify students' individual needs and ensure that these are met.

Students display maturity and take responsibility for their good behaviour in and around the school. They are always very polite and eager to help. They speak proudly of their school and how staff help them to do well. They make an excellent contribution to the school and the wider community. Standards overall are well above average, clearly indicating the good progress students make during their time at the school. The school offers a good range of curricular opportunities, which are personalised to meet the needs of individual students. The broad range of activities within and outside lessons, many reflecting the school's specialist status in science, widens students' horizons, raises their aspirations and improves their achievement. Teaching is good with some that is outstanding. However, opportunities are missed to share outstanding practice widely across subjects and departments. In the best lessons, teachers challenge the students, and opportunities are given for them to discuss their work in ways that develop their thinking. However, in a minority of lessons there are missed opportunities for students to work independently or express their opinion as to what makes successful learning. Teachers indulge in over-long explanations and pose questions that do not always broaden the students' thinking. In some lessons assessment information is not always effectively used to plan lessons that challenge and meet the needs of all the students.

Leadership and management are good. The school has gone from strength to strength since the last inspection, and successfully had its specialist science status renewed. The recent developments in mathematics, including new staff appointments and improved teaching, have been instrumental in improved GCSE results in 2009. The headteacher's energy and vision and the drive for improvement are constantly evolving. She takes

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every opportunity to ensure that the students in the school get the best possible education. The dedicated senior leadership team and the governing body have set a clear direction for continued improvements. They recognise however, that middle managers need to be given greater responsibility so that they become more effective in leading and managing their subjects and holding staff fully to account. The effectiveness of planning and professional development in improving the quality of teaching, overall standards and other aspects of provision clearly show the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve the quality of teaching and the progress students make so that these are consistently good and outstanding by:
  - sharing existing good practice across the school
  - making more consistent use of assessment to plan lessons that meet students' individual needs
  - ensuring appropriate levels of challenge, particularly through questioning, assessment and other planned activities that extend the learning
  - ensuring students have sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of their learning and develop their understanding through sustained periods of independent work
  - inviting students' opinions about what makes successful learning and inspiring lessons.
- Give greater responsibility to middle managers so that they become more effective in leading and managing their subjects and holding staff fully to account.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Students enter the school with above average levels of prior attainment and make good and sometimes excellent progress from Years 7 to 11. Standards have continued to improve and in 2009 the school's GCSE results were well above the national average. Students enjoy their learning, they are well motivated and their achievement is good. There are no significant differences in the patterns of performance between girls and boys, but where any arise, the school acts swiftly to ensure that gaps in achievement are reduced. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress because their academic and personal needs are very well understood and met by the school.

Students say they feel very safe and measures are used consistently to ensure that any bullying, if it were to occur, is reported and dealt with swiftly. Students' behaviour around the school is good and for the most part they behave well in lessons. They are happy, confident and have a positive attitude to their learning and are proud of the range of the different cultures and religions that are represented in the school. They enjoy coming to school as indicated by their outstanding attendance. Students show

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consideration and respect for each other and their teachers as they move about the school. The school actively promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students play a significant role in the life of the school and are encouraged to and readily take responsibility for themselves and those around them. For example, 63 students act as mentors and 73 as prefects. Students have an outstanding understanding of what it means to be healthy and what they need to do to maintain a healthy lifestyle, although some do not always put this into practice all the time. They undertake a wide range of charitable activities through the Catholic Aid for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and other international links. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. The inclusive nature of the school's community and the mutual support student's show for each other is evidence of this. The development of workplace skills is good. Skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) are used well across the curriculum.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

Teaching and learning are good and, in some instances, outstanding. In almost all

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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lessons, students are motivated and make good progress because of firm classroom management and high expectations of behaviour. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. Although teachers use questioning to assess learning, the most effective questioning also challenges the students' thinking ensuring that students consider what they are learning and why. This develops their independent learning skills. However, this was not seen routinely in all lessons. Overall, assessment information is used well in most lessons to tailor teaching more specifically to meet individual students' needs. Written work is marked frequently but, in a few cases, teachers do not always explain clearly enough what students need to do to improve, nor follow up on whether the students have responded to comments in their books.

The curriculum is good. It has been expanded to meet a wider range of needs and interests, particularly improving vocational pathways. Specialist status has enabled the school to both enhance and extend its curriculum. All statutory requirements are met. The curriculum supports students with special educational needs and/or disabilities well and learning support assistants ensure these students participate effectively in all activities.

The curriculum promotes students' moral, social and cultural development well through its well planned course on personal, social and health education, as well as a course on citizenship and global studies. The numerous extra-curricular activities, for example sports, art, music, drama and other specialist interest clubs, further enhance and broaden students' experiences.

The school provides good care, guidance and support. Comprehensive transition arrangements prepare students successfully for both joining and leaving the school. Academic support is focused effectively. Gifted and talented students are supported well through a growing range of opportunities to enable them to fast track qualifications. Science college status has had a marked effect on improving the curriculum through the introduction of well-chosen options and support, enabling all students to make appropriate choices and experience success at a variety of levels, both academically and personally.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership which has improved the school since its last inspection. She has a clear vision for the

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school with a passionate belief in inclusion. All students are valued, and those with particular needs are nurtured well. The strong and effective senior leadership team, the governing body and staff share this vision. This is recognised fully by parents and students, who appreciate the very strong and positive school ethos that promotes academic success and personal development in all students. The school regularly reflects on its practice and has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for further development. The monitoring of teaching is regular and accurate. Strategies to eradicate any weaknesses in teaching have been effective. The quality of middle leadership varies but is good overall and it has driven improvement in many subjects. Many of the subject self-evaluations inform whole school developments. This is particularly evident in, for example, mathematics, science and geography.

Governance is good. Governors have a good knowledge and understanding of the school and what needs to improve to make it even better. They offer challenge and support, and ensure that the school meets all statutory requirements. School finances are managed well. The school's promotion of, and approach to, community cohesion is good. Students appreciate the feeling of togetherness that the school's Catholic ethos provides. The school plays a significant role in its local community, including strong links with local primary schools through a wide range of projects. However, it does not always evaluate the impact of this work on its communities. The school's international status is effectively extending the range of opportunities for students to broaden their horizons and extend their global awareness.

Clear safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and meet government requirements. The school deploys its resource well and provides good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>



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## Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. It is well led by senior staff who are keen to improve the variety of provision available to students. Since the last inspection, good teaching has advanced students' progress from satisfactory to good. Teaching prepares students for examinations effectively but teachers have a tendency to talk for too long, limiting students' opportunities to be more active in leading the learning for themselves. The vast majority of students gain the qualifications they pursue. The very large majority of the students continue to their choices of course in higher education; a few enter the most prestigious universities. Students are self-disciplined and reliable. They show commendable commitment to supporting younger students both academically and pastorally. They lead fund-raising for charities, reflecting their impressive moral and social sense of responsibility. Their spiritual development is outstanding and they are reflective and mature individuals. The students say with conviction that they greatly enjoy their sixth form experience.

The curriculum provides a good choice of AS and A Level courses. The range of vocational opportunities has increased and further expansion planned. Students find the compulsory course on 'Christian living' particularly helpful and informative. Enrichment and extra-curricular learning opportunities are extensive and students participate with enthusiasm.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

## Views of parents and carers

Parents' views about the school were generally very positive. Many praised specific aspects of the school's work, including the care and support offered to them and their children. All respondents stated that their children were happy at school, well cared for and enjoyed attending. As one parent wrote, 'excellent Year 6 to 7 transition, supportive staff and the head is very approachable'. Parents also stated that healthy lifestyles were promoted well.

The school agreed with a small minority of parents who raised issues about wanting even greater communication and involvement between the school and home. A few concerns were raised which were related to individual matters rather than whole-school issues.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Peter's Catholic School and science specialist college to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 286 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1283 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	134	47	141	49	8	3	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	116	41	157	55	11	4	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	81	30	165	62	19	7	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	105	38	155	56	13	5	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	88	32	170	62	10	4	5	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	77	28	163	60	31	11	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	68	25	167	61	40	14	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	82	32	162	63	14	5	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	89	33	164	60	19	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	81	31	142	54	25	10	13	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	58	23	157	63	31	12	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	89	32	167	61	13	5	6	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	130	47	130	47	16	6	3	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



16 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St Peter's Catholic School and Specialist Science College, Solihull, B91 3NZ

I would like to thank you all for your help during our visit. We found what you had to say very helpful in making our judgment about the school. We were pleased to hear that so many of you enjoy attending school. Many of you told us how friendly and helpful the staff are and how much you enjoy the range of subjects you study. We were pleased to see so many of you willingly take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly those linked with your school's science specialism.

We found your school to be good with many outstanding features. The curriculum is rich and varied, allowing you to develop well as young people. It provides you with many opportunities to develop a wide range of skills. Your teachers are helpful and supportive and most make your lessons interesting by involving you in learning. The care, guidance and support you receive are good and you are well prepared for the future. We were particularly impressed with the contribution you make to the school and wider community. A large number of you act as mentors and prefects and act as great ambassadors for the school. We were also very impressed with your knowledge and understanding about adopting healthy lifestyles, although we noticed that some of you did not always practice them.

We worked very closely with your headteacher and other staff and agreed on what the school should do to make it even better. We have asked the school to:

Improve the quality of teaching and the progress you make so that these are consistently good and outstanding by:

- sharing existing good practice across the school
- making more consistent use of assessment to plan lessons that meet your individual needs
- ensuring appropriate levels of challenge, particularly through questioning, assessment and other planned activities that extend your learning
- ensuring that you have sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of your learning and develop your understanding through sustained periods of independent work
- invite your opinions about what makes successful learning and inspiring lessons.

Give greater responsibility to the middle managers so that they become more effective in leading and managing their subjects.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Rashida Sharif

Her Majesty's Inspector

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